

[Old Well on Pigeon Ranch]

Interviews

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Date: April 28, 1939

Words: 2300

Subject: Old Well on Pigeon

Ranch now owned by Tom Greer.

Source of Information:

Octaviano Segura of Pecos, N. M.

now deceased. Teodosio Ortiz,

Pecos, N. M. Charles Erickson,

Pecos, N. M.

OLD WELL ON PIGEON RANCH

The well about a mile east of the town of Glorieta, close to and on the south side of highway 85 and situated on, what was once known as the "Pigeon Ranch" is the subject under consideration.

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This well, advertised by the present owner, Mr. Tom Greer, as the “Most Historical, Indian, Spanish, American Well,” had drawn much comment from the local inhabitants, in and around Glorieta and Pecos. This well attracted no special attention, more than that it was one of the early wells of this section, until Mr. Greer became its possessor and acclaimed it as being of great antiquity.

Fortunately for Mr. Greer most of the old men whose memories hark back to the time when the well was dug have passed from the scene and their direct testimony can no longer be had. Some of the descendants of these old men of the past can remember hearing their fathers tell about the digging of the well and the man who owned the property at the time and had the work done but such testimony is too far removed to establish the case as a historical fact. Whatever may be said of this handed down testimony from “mouth to ear” as the Indians call it, it is so well believed in all their section that all of the old timers, smile in derision at Mr. Greer's claims that the well is of great antiquity. C.15 [N Mex?].

About three or four years ago I began interviewing some of the older men in the Pecos district to see if I could find any definite evidence about the old well, however, I was unable to get any more than, that it was the 2 talk of their fathers that the well was the product of a Frenchman by the name of Alexander Valle. At that time I only interviewed such men as occasion presented itself and made no notes of their testimony. I did at that time, however, find one man who gave me such a clear line of facts, as given to him, by Alexander Valle and one of the men who had a hand in digging the well that I was convinced that the story he told actually revealed the facts. This man was Octaviano Segura, who unfortunately died about a year after I last talked to him on the subject.

Mr. Segura told me that he could not give the date of the digging of the well or any personal testimony concerning it, but that he had it directly from Mr. Valle that he (Alexander Valle) who was at that time the owner of the ranch on which the well was located, had the well dug to obtain clean water for his people at that ranch, because his herds of cattle and sheep were polluting the little stream close to the well, on which they

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previously had to depend for water. Mr. Segura also told me that he had talked to one of the men who helped dig the well. In the course of our conversation he said it was, unfortunate that Mr. Greer did not start his advertising ten years earlier while Antonio Roybal was still alive for, he had once heard Antonio say that he remembered seeing the actual digging of the well. Mr. Segura was an outstanding man in this community and was respected by all for his intelligence and integrity. I have every reason to believe that Mr. Segura gave me a faithful account of what he had heard from participants in the digging of the well and from the eye witness who saw it in the making.

Since I have been asked to write a manuscript on the subject I have looked around in search of some one who could furnish additional reliable data on the subject of this old well.

3

The difficulty is that before Mr. Greer, for reasons of his own, saw fit to paint the "Hoary head" of antiquity on it, it was just a well on the old Pigeon Ranch by the side of a cross country road. I had almost despaired of getting any first hand positive facts about the origin and time of the digging of the well, when a friend of mine asked me if I had talked to Teodosio Ortiz.

When I was asked if I had talked to Teodosio, as we call him, I felt like a simpleton, for I have known him for nearly seventeen years. I have known all about his worth as an intelligent and reliable citizen and neighbor, and that his word is never questioned but somehow I had so far overlooked him as a possibility for the information I was seeking. My friend who called my attention to him, said that, Teodosio in his earlier years lived not far from the old well and if he did have any information on it I could rely on it as being correct. I, however, needed no proof of Teodosio's manhood, intelligence and integrity for I have heard naught but praise of this man's virtues in these respects and I know enough about him personally to warrant my complete confidence in him. He is well known in this section for his prodigious memory and accuracy of statements.

This man, Teodosio Ortiz, is now eighty-six years of age, and though the long years of toil have slowed down his bodily movements his fertile mind is still active and dependable. I have during the last ten days, had several interviews with him, and in these I have subjected him to considerable cross examination. The result of my talks with Teodosio have been that he can tell only what he knows and that he tells what he personally knows with accuracy and assurance.

4

When I first asked Mr. Teodosio Ortiz what he thought of Mr. Greer's claims about the age of the well that he is so elaborately advertising, his reply, of what he thought about Mr. Greer's claims, need not be repeated here, but [?] when I asked him how he knew that Mr. Greer was advertising false claims about the history of the well, his answer was very direct, as follows: "Because I remember seeing the final work on the well and I knew the very men who dug it and the man for whom it was dug and the reasons why the owner of the ranch had the well dug. The names of the three men who dug the well were: Luis Moya, Rafael Lucero and Antonio Gabaldon. The ranch on which the well was dug was owned by a Frenchman, Mr. Alexander Valle. This Frenchman spoke a peculiarly accented English which they called "Pigeon English" and so the ranch got to be called the Pigeon Ranch."

"Mr. Ortiz, how old were you when you saw this well being finished?"

"I was five years of age at the time, but the memory of it stands as clear in my mind as any other event of my younger years. I do not only have the memory of the work itself but throughout my growing years I was much in association with the men who did the work and I remember on several occasions hearing these men tell the whole story about the well."

I then asked Teodosio to tell me all he knew about it.

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"The well was begun and partially dug in 1851, two years before I was born, but for some reason Mr. Valle suspended work on the well for seven years. My birth was in 1853, and it was not until 1858, when I was five years old that he again [?] put his men to work on it and finished it. The unknown reasons of the interim of seven years between the beginning and the finishing of the well furnished [?] food for fireside chats and helped keep the subject alive for a time.

5

It was on such occasions and others that I heard the three men who dug the well tell the whole story about it. These three men I have named as the diggers of the well were regular employees of Alexander Valle over a long period and thus I saw much of them during my early years.

"Mr. Valle was at that time the owner of the present Valley Ranch. He also had several outlying ranches, of which the "Pigeon Ranch" on which this well was dug, was one. He was the owner of many cattle, sheep and goats and herds in the Glorieta region were polluting the little stream from which his ranch house had to be supplied with water. Mr. Valle was a very fine man and much concerned about the welfare of the people who worked for him and when he saw the filthy condition of the little brook he decided to dig a well to furnish clean water for his ranch."

I have often wondered why the present well was of such great diameter. All kinds of stories have circulated from every quarter since Mr. Greer started his flashy advertising of its great antiquity. Some people have told that the well was out of use for many years and got filled up with silt and has of recent years been dug out anew. I have run down several of such tales only to find them without foundation. The reason that the well is of such great diameter is a simple tale. I have the story from both Teodosio Ortiz and Charles Erickson of Pecos.

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The years of 1903 and 1904 were very dry years in this state and the water from Canyonsito that supplies the Santa Fe Railroad, at Lamy, was giving out. Mr. M. R. Williams who had charge of the water supply for the road, on this division; made arrangements with the then owners of the well to enlarge it and sink it deeper, in the hope of finding an adequate supply to splice out their needs. Mr. Williams took over a crew of men and enlarged the hole but for some reason abandoned the enterprise. This work was done in 1904.

6

In the latter part of that season generous rains came to this section and replenished their supply and this may have been the cause for the suspension of the work.

I have, so far, not found a man who has ever seen the little stream that flows close by the well, without running water. Teodosio Ortiz in his 86 years has never seen it dry. It is therefore out of the question that Indians dug a well high on a dry bank close to a running brook, and more, when the perennial springs that feed it are not far away. Even with the absence of historical evidence to the contrary, the claim of Indian origin for this well would be utterly ridiculous.

It may be questioned by some people that the testimony of a man about an affair when he was five years of age, could be held as reliable. My parents emigrated from Europe when I was a month under three years of age. On the voyage across the Atlantic a school of porpoise in their over and under motion in almost uniform arrangement, moved by our ship. It was a great sight to me and the picture it presented has never faded from my memory.

In connection with the memory, of the digging, of the old well by Mr. Ortiz, it was perhaps the first well digging the child ever witnessed and having a marvelous memory, the affair has never faded from his mind. We must also remember that he grew up in the association of the men who did the work and their occasional conversations about it assisted in getting

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all the facts and fixing the event for good upon his memory. The further fact that the well was dug for the outstanding man of the little world in which the boy then lived had its weight in making it an outstanding affair.

When we take into consideration this testimony of Teodosio Ortiz as it parallels the testimony gathered by Mr. Segura as he delivered it to me, I feel that it is needless to look for more testimony unless there is somewhere a man who was an eye witness to the digging like Mr. Ortiz.

7

In the light of the testimony I have presented, and the fact that all the rumbling of the echoes of the past generation, are against the idea of ascribing a great age for the Pigeon Ranch. Well, I am satisfied that the well was the product of Alexander Valle and dug for the purpose of having clean water for his people. According to the evidences I have presented, the wall is now 81 years old and does not go back into remote times as is claimed by Mr. Tom Greer.

I think we should have a law in this state, making it mandatory for a person wishing to commercialize a historical landmark, to submit a brief in support of the historicity of his claims, and that such recital of historical matter should receive special investigation by a proper committee. If such a committee finds that the contentions in the brief have proper historical support the applicant should be granted a license, upon paying a proper fee, to advertise such a landmark and exploit it under certain legal provisions, however, his advertising should not embrace contentions beyond the established facts of history. If on the other hand the claims of the brief do not have the proper historical support, then no license should be granted.